United States of America

**Report on Groundfish Activities by California Department of Fish and Wildlife in 2024**

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Prepared for the

Canada-United States Groundfish Technical Committee

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# Executive Summary (1 - 2 paragraphs)

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) declared quillback rockfish off California overfished in late 2023. As a result of the overfished status determination for this stock, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) undertook several regulatory rulemakings which significantly changed how recreational and commercial groundfish fisheries operate in both state and federal waters. Throughout 2024, efforts have been made to increase collection of age data and explore use of Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV) surveys in stock assessments.

# Surveys and Monitoring (1 - 2 paragraphs for each program/survey)

A lack of California specific age data has been identified in several stock assessments as part of the Pacific Fishery Management Council Research and Data Needs. To that end, CDFW has made dedicated efforts to increase age data collection from the recreational groundfish fishery utilizing different data collection programs.

The California Recreational Fisheries Survey (CRFS) collects angler surrendered copper, quillback and yelloweye rockfishes that were kept/retained by anglers erroneously due to species misidentification or inaccurate interpretation of authorized take regulations. This began with yelloweye rockfish, a prohibited species, and was subsequently expanded to include copper and quillback rockfishes. These CRFS angler surrendered fish are part of standardized CRFS sampling procedures and can be associated with raw sample data. In the case of species kept in excess of a bag or sub-bag limit, it is up to angler discretion to determine which fish to surrender.

The Rockfish Biological Groundfish sampling project is conducted by CDFW’s groundfish project staff, began in 2021 and is the largest and most species diverse set of biological data from California’s recreational fishery. Sampling design and protocols were subsequently refined in 2022, in consultation with NMFS science center staff to address potential bias issues and be more representative of the fishery.

Since 2021, a federally issued Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) has allowed CDFW to collect age and maturity data from cowcod incidentally encountered by participating recreational charter vessels during their routine fishing activities. Beginning in 2025, vessels participating in CDFW’s EFP will also be able to collect yelloweye and quillback rockfishes, in addition to cowcod.

# Research (1 paragraph for each project)

In recognition of more than 20 years of large-scale Rockfish Conservation Area closures combined with California’s Marine Protected Area Network, CDFW has been working on incorporating ROV data collected inside and outside closed areas into stock assessments. Recently, ROV surveys were endorsed for potential use to inform stock assessments, particularly for abundance. For California, potential relative indices of abundance and estimates of absolute abundance (with expansion) were identified for brown, China, copper, gopher, quillback, and vermilion rockfishes and kelp greenling.

# Stock Assessments and Management by Species/Group (1 – 3 paragraphs for each species/group)

The overfished declaration of California quillback rockfish and resultant limited amount of allowable mortality drastically changed how recreational and commercial groundfish fisheries may legally operate off California. For the portion of California’s coast where quillback rockfish occur, both recreational and commercial sectors have lost access to core depths where the species are most commonly encountered (between 20 and 50 fathoms). Commercial vessels operating in California state waters are further restricted to species authorized for take under the State issued limited access Nearshore Permits (nearshore rockfish, California sheephead, cabezon, California scorpionfish and greenlings of the genus *hexagrammos*).

# Reserves (1 – 3 paragraphs)

California’s Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are managed as a statewide network through the MPA Management Program. This program consists of four pillars (research and management, enforcement and compliance, outreach and education, and, policy and permitting) and was designed to facilitate the adaptive management of California’s MPA Network as an interconnected system of protected areas along the entire California coast. More information may be found on [CDFW’s MPA webpage](https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs).

# Data Management (1- 3 paragraphs)

CDFW is in the initial stages of addressing data modernization challenges surrounding contracted commercial biological sample data, state mandated logbooks and other commercial data streams.

# Upcoming Work, Emerging Needs, and Challenges (3 paragraphs)

The Pacific Fishery Management Council is currently examining defining groundfish stocks off the West Coast. This may change how stocks currently within the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) are defined moving forward, including designating some species as “ecosystem component species” (i.e., remains in the FMP, but is not targeted or actively managed, but is monitored) or be completely removed for the Pacific Coast Groundfish FMP. Depending on the outcome, there may be changes to the jurisdiction for some species, which is likely to result in, yet to be determined, emerging regulatory and data collection needs.

# Other Publications (list)

None.

# Agency Contact List (1-2 pages)

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